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## Information

### *Professional Services Committee*

#### **Report on the Commission's Regional Accreditation Requirement and on Institutions Requesting a Temporary Waiver of Regional Accreditation**

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**Executive Summary:** This agenda report reviews the policies and procedures for granting initial accreditation, provides information about WASC accreditation procedures, and summarizes prior Commission actions regarding institutions requesting a temporary waiver of the regional accreditation requirement.

**Recommended Action:** For information only

**Presenter:** Lawrence Birch, Director,  
Professional Services Division

**Strategic Plan Goal: 1**

**Promote educational excellence through the preparation and certification of professional educators**

- ◆ Sustain high quality standards for the preparation and performance of professional educators and for the accreditation of credential programs

November 2008



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# **Report on the Commission's Regional Accreditation Requirement and on Institutions Requesting a Temporary Waiver of Regional Accreditation**

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## **Introduction**

At the June 2008 Commission meeting, staff was requested to bring back information about the regional accreditation requirement for earning initial institutional approval and also to report on prior Commission actions regarding institutions requesting a waiver of the Commission's regional accreditation requirement. In response to that request, this agenda item reviews the policies and procedures for granting initial accreditation, provides information about WASC accreditation procedures, and summarizes prior Commission actions regarding institutions requesting a temporary waiver of the regional accreditation requirement.

## **Background**

For institutions based in California, the regional accrediting body is the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). For out-of-state institutions, the Commission will accept regional accreditation conferred by any of the six federally-recognized regional accrediting bodies.

The purpose of requiring regional accreditation for initial institutional approval from the Commission is to establish an institution's viability to develop, implement, and sustain one or more programs of professional preparation in California. Therefore, WASC or other regional accreditation assures the Commission that an institution of higher education meets certain standards in relation to educational effectiveness, student learning, and institutional capacity. Regional accreditation status allows the Commission's work with an institution to focus on the educator preparation unit, its approved credential programs, and the knowledge and skills of its candidates and program completers.

## **Policies for Initial Eligibility of Institutions and Accreditation of Programs**

Pursuant to the California Education Code, the Commission has the authority to determine the eligibility of institutions to offer educator preparation programs and to recommend issuance of credentials to candidates completing preparation programs. This authority also applies to other program sponsors such as school districts.

Education Code § 44227 (a) states that "The Commission may approve any institution of higher education whose teacher education program meets the standards prescribed by the Commission, to recommend to the Commission the issuance of credentials to persons who have successfully completed a teacher education program of the institution if the program meets the standards approved by the Commission." Further, Education Code § 44372 (c) states that the powers and duties of the Commission on Teacher Credentialing shall include the following: ". . . rule on the eligibility of an applicant for accreditation when the applying institution has not previously prepared educators for state certification in California, pursuant to subdivision (a) of § 44227."

Pursuant to the Education Code, the Committee on Accreditation (COA) makes decisions about the accreditation of programs. Education Code § 44373 (c) (1-5) outlines the powers and duties of the Committee on Accreditation. Sections 44373 (1) and (2) read as follows: “The committee shall do, but shall not be limited to doing, all of the following:

- (1) Make decisions about the accreditation of educator preparation. The committee’s decision making process shall be in accordance with the accreditation framework.
- (2) Make decisions about the initial accreditation of new programs of educator preparation in accordance with procedures established by the committee.”

### **Initial Institutional Approval and Initial Program Accreditation in the Commission’s Accreditation System**

The Commission’s accreditation system makes a distinction between “initial approval of institutions” and “initial approval of programs.” A prospective program sponsor that wishes to offer a credential program in California and that has not previously been declared eligible to offer a credential preparation program must undergo a two-stage initial approval process: 1) initial institutional approval, and 2) initial accreditation of programs as described below. The steps for both processes are as follows:

- (1) *Initial Institutional Approval*: The institution (program sponsor) that has not previously been declared eligible to offer credential preparation programs must submit an application to the Commission for initial institutional approval. The institution prepares a complete program proposal that responds to all Preconditions, Common Standards and appropriate Program Standards. The application is reviewed first for compliance with the appropriate preconditions (e.g., regional accreditation [or governing board approval], identification of the position responsible for oversight, non-discrimination procedures, completion of a needs assessment, involvement of practitioners in the design of the program, and agreement to provide information to the Commission) and for appropriate responses to the Common Standards relating to capacity to offer a preparation program. Once the first stage of the review has been accomplished and all responses have been found satisfactory, a recommendation is brought before the Commission for *initial institutional approval*. This stage of the process determines only an institution’s *eligibility* to offer an approved program.
- (2) *Initial Accreditation of Programs*: Once the Commission acts favorably on institutional approval, the *program proposal* is forwarded to the Committee on Accreditation for action. The program sponsor is required to respond to the appropriate credential program standards for each program the institution wishes to offer. These responses are reviewed by a panel of expert advisors, or in some cases, Commission staff, to determine the adequacy and quality of the responses with respect to the applicable program standards. Once it is determined that the program proposal meets the Commission’s program standards, the program sponsor is recommended to the Committee on Accreditation for *initial program approval*.

Once granted initial program approval, the institution is given authority to begin the program and will then come under the Commission's continuing accreditation procedures.

### **The Western Association of Schools and Colleges Accreditation Process**

The Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) provides the following information on its web page, <http://www.wascweb.org/>:

The Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), a 501 (c) 3 organization, is recognized as one of six regional associations that accredit public and private schools, colleges, and universities in the United States.

The Western region covers institutions in California and Hawaii, the territories of Guam, American Samoa, Federated States of Micronesia, Republic of Palau, Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands, the Pacific Basin, and East Asia, and areas of the Pacific and East Asia where American/International schools or colleges may apply to it for service.

The accrediting activities of WASC are conducted by the three Commissions listed below. Each Commission works with a different segment of education.

(1) The Accrediting Commission for Schools

Accredits schools below the college level including elementary, junior high, middle, high school, and adult schools, whether public, private, or church-related.

(2) The Accrediting Commission for community and Junior Colleges (ACCJC)

Accredits public and private postsecondary institutions that offer two-year education programs and award the associate degree.

(3) The Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities

Accredits public and private senior colleges and universities.

The Commission's interactions with WASC are with the Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities. The WASC Standards for Senior Colleges and Universities are presented in Appendix A of this agenda item.

Institutions seeking accreditation from WASC, as California's regional accrediting agency, must go through three major steps before accreditation is conferred: eligibility, candidacy and accreditation. It is the purpose of the WASC Accrediting Commission to validate to the public the ongoing credibility of an institution of higher education. Completion of all three steps can take from four to six years, and in some cases, even longer.

An institution that is accredited by WASC has demonstrated both of the following:

- I. Commitment to Institutional Capacity: The institution functions with clear purposes, high levels of institutional integrity, fiscal stability, and organizational structures to fulfill its purposes.

- II. Commitment to Educational Effectiveness: The institution evidences clear and appropriate educational objectives and design at the institutional and program level, and employs processes of review, including the collection and use of data, that assure delivery of programs and learner accomplishments at a level of performance appropriate for the degree or certificate awarded.

Eligibility – Eligibility is the first step toward the process of accreditation. Institutions must first be reviewed for eligibility based upon requirements established by the WASC Commission. The process, guided by 23 eligibility criteria (see Appendix B), and anticipating the WASC standards, screens each institution to determine whether it is ready to begin the formal process of data collection and institutional reflection required for an accreditation review. The institution must assess itself in relation to the eligibility criteria which address a wide range of issues related to institutional capacity.

The institution submits an eligibility report responding to each of the eligibility criteria and a summary data form. The institution is expected to already be offering courses and degrees at the time of eligibility determination. The WASC Commission staff convenes an Eligibility Review Committee which reviews the documents and meets with institutional representatives before determining eligibility. The committee files a report of its action and a review of the institution in relation to each of the criteria. Although not a formal status with the WASC Commission, eligibility signifies that an institution has satisfied the 23 criteria regarding institutional capacity and is eligible to proceed toward a review for Candidacy status with the Accrediting Commission.

Candidacy – Candidacy is achieved after the institution has completed an initial self-study report responding to the WASC standards and has been successful in an on-site visit. The response to the standards is at the level of performance described in the Criteria for Review and Guidelines. The site review is a two-stage process: a Capacity and Preparatory Review, followed by the Educational Effectiveness Review. This is fundamentally a compliance review in which an institution demonstrates that it meets the expectations for accreditation at a minimum level and has a plan in place to meet all the standards at a substantial level by the time of the Initial Accreditation Review. Candidacy is a formal status with the WASC Commission and is an indication that an institution is progressing toward accreditation. An institution with Candidate status has a maximum period of four years to become accredited. This candidacy period enables an institution to organize its operations; establish sound policies, procedures, and management information systems; improve quality; and demonstrate that it meets WASC standards. The granting of candidacy does not assure that accreditation will eventually be attained.

Accreditation – An institution may seek accreditation after an appropriate period of Candidacy. It must have graduated at least one class in one or more of its principal programs. The institution is required to undergo an extensive and comprehensive self-study responding to the WASC standards again at the level of performance described in the Criteria for Review (CFR) and Guidelines. This is followed by an on-site evaluation of institutional performance that is also a two-stage process: a Capacity and Preparatory Review, followed by the Educational Effectiveness Review. This review moves beyond a mere compliance review, considering evidence of the institution's capacity for deep engagement with significant issues. Accreditation

means that the institution meets the WASC standards at a substantial level and is likely to continue to do so. In addition, the status of “Accreditation” indicates that the institution operates at a high level of quality consistent with its stated purposes; that it has documented the availability of sufficient resources to support existing and planned programs at a satisfactory level of quality; and that it has committed itself to institutional improvement, periodic self-evaluation, and continuing compliance with WASC standards, policies and procedures.

### **Prior Requests for Waiver of the WASC Accreditation Requirement**

During the past seventeen years, the Commission has taken action to waive the WASC accreditation requirement for five California institutions. Institutions for whom waivers were granted have taken from three to eight years to complete the steps within the WASC process. Under the provisions of Education Code §44225 (m) that grants the Commission waiver authority, waivers can be given to postsecondary institutions. One of the reasons given for granting waivers listed in § 44225 is to “Provide other temporary exceptions when deemed to be appropriate by the Commission.” In the past, the Commission has granted waivers with the understanding that

- these waivers are temporary;
- they enable educational institutions to meet the goals established by the state;
- they provide significant help in addressing identified critical needs of schools and school children; and
- there are accompanying mechanisms for assuring that Commission standards are not lowered and the quality of preparation is maintained under the waiver provisions.

Each of the five institutions granted waivers is described below.

#### **A. California State University, San Marcos**

In 1991, the Commission granted a waiver of the WASC accreditation requirement to California State University, San Marcos. At the time, CSUSM had already reached Candidate status for WASC accreditation. The institution was founded in 1989 and achieved WASC accreditation in 1993. A year later, the Commission conducted a program evaluation visit at California State University, San Marcos and in 1995 the institution achieved accreditation from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). Since that time, the institution has maintained its accreditation status with WASC, the Commission, and NCATE.

#### **B. National Hispanic University**

National Hispanic University was founded in 1981. In 1994, the Commission granted the institution a three year waiver of the WASC accreditation requirement, in which time the institution was expected to achieve WASC Candidacy. At the time of the waiver, National Hispanic University had already achieved WASC Eligibility. The waiver included an acceptance of baccalaureate degrees awarded by the institution for credential purposes, the eligibility to submit one or more subject matter preparation programs and the eligibility to submit one or more professional preparation programs. The institution subsequently received approval for the Liberal Studies subject matter program and the Multiple Subject CLAD/BCLAD Emphasis Credential program. In 1997, the institution was granted a one year extension of the waiver because WASC Candidacy had not yet been achieved. In 1998 WASC Candidacy was earned. The institution was granted an additional year of waiver in order for the Commission to review

the results of the Committee on Accreditation on-site visit to be conducted in Spring 1999. Stipulations were placed upon the institution at that time and the COA sent an accreditation revisit team in May of 2000. As a result of the revisit, the COA removed the stipulations. Subsequently, National Hispanic University received WASC accreditation in June 2002.

### **C. California State University, Monterey Bay**

California State University, Monterey Bay (CSUMB) was founded in 1994. In 1995, CSUMB was granted a waiver of the WASC accreditation requirement for an unspecified time. At the time of the waiver, the institution had already achieved WASC Eligibility. The waiver included an acceptance of baccalaureate degrees awarded by the institution for credential purposes, the eligibility to submit one or more subject matter preparation programs, and the eligibility to submit one or more professional preparation programs. The institution subsequently received approval for the Liberal Studies subject matter program and the Multiple Subject CLAD/BCLAD Emphasis Credential program. In 1998, WASC Candidacy was earned. The COA conducted an on-site accreditation visit in 1998. Stipulations were placed upon the institution at that time and a successful accreditation revisit was completed in 1999, after which the COA removed the stipulations. California State University, Monterey Bay received WASC accreditation in June 2003. The institution hosted a site visit seeking NCATE initial accreditation in November 2007 and was given Provisional Accreditation, which necessitated a site visit in December 2008. The 2007 site visit also included state team members and the state finding was Accreditation with Technical Stipulations. In December 2008, there will be a COA and NCATE revisit. After the revisit, the COA will make a final decision about the stipulations and NCATE will make a decision about initial accreditation for the institution.

### **D. Inter-American College**

Inter-American College (IAC) was founded in 1997. In December 1999, the institution was granted Eligibility by the WASC for a term of three years. By achieving Eligibility, the institution completed the first step toward the process of accreditation. Because the institution had not yet achieved WASC accreditation, the institution asked the Commission for a waiver of the WASC accreditation requirement so that they might gain initial institutional approval. The waiver included an acceptance of baccalaureate degrees awarded by the institution for credential purposes, the eligibility to submit one or more subject matter preparation programs and the eligibility to submit one or more professional preparation programs. The waiver was granted in September 2000. The institution was scheduled for a COA accreditation site visit in Spring 2003. However, when the Commission acted to suspend state accreditation site visits, the visit was not held. The institution has continued its work toward accreditation and was given an extension of two years by WASC in order to earn Candidacy. In June 2005, WASC Candidacy was awarded for a period of four years.

Once the Commission resumed accreditation site visits, Inter-American College was scheduled for a site visit the first year, in Spring 2008. In March 2008, the site visit was held and the institution was granted the status of "Accreditation" by the Committee on Accreditation. At the site visit, all standards were met for both the Multiple and Single Subject Bilingual Emphasis credential programs. Inter-American College is now in the final year of its Candidacy with WASC and has just concluded the WASC Capacity Review Site Visit. The Effectiveness



Review Site Visit will be conducted in March 2009. By June 2009, WASC will make its final decision on the accreditation of IAC.

#### **E. California State University, Channel Islands**

California State University, Channel Islands (CSUCI) opened in 2002. Because the institution had not yet achieved WASC accreditation, CSUCI requested a waiver of the regional accreditation requirement in order to gain initial institutional accreditation from the Commission. The Commission granted the waiver in July 2002 and CSUCI was given initial institutional approval. At that time, the institution submitted a multiple subject teacher preparation program and an elementary subject matter preparation program. In October 2001, the Eligibility Committee of WASC granted CSUCI Eligibility. In February 2002 the CSUCI submitted its Proposal for Candidacy Review. The institution was granted Candidacy in February 2005. Subsequently, the institution requested a review for initial accreditation and the institution was granted WASC accreditation in May 2007. CSUCI is scheduled for a Commission site visit in Spring 2009.

## **Appendix A**

### **Information about WASC Standards**

#### **Accreditation Standards**

To help institutions and others interpret and apply the Core Commitments to Institutional Capacity and to Educational Effectiveness, the WASC Commission has defined Standards for Accreditation.

These Standards are intended to serve several purposes:

- To guide institutions in self-review as a basis for assessing institutional performance, and to identify needed areas of improvement
- To provide a framework for institutional presentations to the Commission and review teams
- To serve as the basis for judgment by evaluation teams in the institutional review process for the Capacity and Preparatory Review in addressing the Core Commitment to Institutional Capacity and for the Educational Effectiveness Review in addressing the Core Commitment to Educational Effectiveness
- To provide a foundation for Commission actions and the basis for required institutional follow up to such actions
- To assist those involved in the accrediting process, in higher education generally, and members of the public, in defining institutional quality and educational effectiveness, and in promoting the development and sharing of practices leading to the improvement of quality

#### **Format of the Standards**

Each Standard is constructed with the following interrelated elements:

##### The Standard

While specific content areas are distinguished within each of the four Standards, each is intended to be an integrated topic, framed to emphasize holistic organizational performance. To emphasize the holistic manner in which the contents of each Standard are viewed and applied, judgments will be made, to the extent possible, at the level of the Standard itself. Each of the four Standards begins with a “statement of the Standard,” defining the basis for judgment. Within each Standard are also sub-areas defining topical areas essential to the Standard itself.

##### Criteria for Review

Within each sub-area are Criteria for Review (CFRs), intended to identify key areas for the review of each Standard. Criteria for Review are meant to support basic decisions about accreditation and enable the Commission to render an effective judgment on the performance of an institution.

##### Guidelines

The Commission has identified in the Guidelines expected forms or methods for demonstrating performance related to certain Criteria for Review. The Guidelines are provided because institutions often request a specific interpretation of a CFR. The Commission has also found the need to identify the normative way institutions have addressed the Criterion for Review

referenced by the Guideline. By design, the Commission has not developed a Guideline for each Criterion for Review. Where Guidelines are identified, the Commission is attempting to assist institutions with further interpretation of the Criteria for Review and to provide ways by which institutions can demonstrate that they have addressed them. For example, a substantial core of full-time faculty would be commonly expected as part of an institution's demonstration that it has addressed Criterion for Review 3.2. The Commission remains concerned with demonstrated results rather than prescribing a specific form of institutional practice. If an institution chooses not to employ the practices described in a particular Guideline, the institution is responsible for showing that it has addressed the intent of the Criterion in an equally effective way.

#### Related Commission Policies

The Commission has adopted policies and statements that apply to all candidate and accredited institutions. These policies and statements represent official Commission positions, and institutions are expected to adhere to their provisions. Institutions and teams are also expected to include relevant policies as part of the accreditation review process. Following each of the four Standards are references to policies that are of particular relevance to those Standards, and to the related CFRs and Guidelines. These listings of references are not intended to be all inclusive. Institutions are encouraged to become familiar with and to review periodically all Commission policies and statements. When new policies are adopted or existing policies are revised, they are posted to the official website of the Commission at [wascsenior.org](http://wascsenior.org).

### **Standard 1: Defining Institutional Purposes and Ensuring Educational Objectives**

- Institutional Purposes
- Integrity

The institution defines its purposes and establishes educational objectives aligned with its purposes and character. It has a clear and conscious sense of its essential values and character, its distinctive elements, its place in the higher education community, and its relationship to society at large. Through its purposes and educational objectives, the institution dedicates itself to higher learning, the search for truth, and the dissemination of knowledge. The institution functions with integrity and autonomy.

### **Standard 2: Achieving Educational Objectives through Core Functions**

- Teaching and Learning
- Scholarship and Creative Activity
- Support for Student Learning and Success

The institution achieves its institutional purposes and attains its educational objectives through the core functions of teaching and learning, scholarship and creative activity, and support for student learning and success. It demonstrates that these core functions are performed effectively and that they support one another in the institution's efforts to attain educational effectiveness.

### **Standard 3: Developing and Applying Resources and Organizational Structures to Ensure Sustainability**

- Faculty and Staff
- Fiscal, Physical and Information Resources
- Organizational Structures and Decision-making Processes

The institution sustains its operations and supports the achievement of its educational objectives through its investment in human, physical, fiscal, and information resources and through an appropriate and effective set of organizational and decision-making structures. These key resources and organizational structures promote the achievement of institutional purposes and educational objectives and create a high quality environment for learning.

**Standard 4: Creating an Organization Committed to Learning and Improvement**

- Strategic Thinking and Planning
- Commitment to Learning and Improvement

The institution conducts sustained, evidence-based, and participatory discussions about how effectively it is accomplishing its purposes and achieving its educational objectives. These activities inform both institutional planning and systematic evaluations of educational effectiveness. The results of institutional inquiry, research, and data collection are used to establish priorities at different levels of the institution, and to revise institutional purposes, structures, and approaches to teaching, learning, and scholarly work.

## **Appendix B**

### **Summary of WASC Eligibility Criteria**

- 1) Authority – Institution is authorized to operate as an educational institution and to award degrees by the appropriate governmental agency.
- 2) Purposes – Institution’s purposes are clearly defined and appropriate for higher education.
- 3) Institutional Integrity – Institution offers academic programs and administrative support consistent with its purposes.
- 4) Governing Board – Institution has a functioning governing board responsible for the quality, integrity, and financial sustainability of the institution.
- 5) Chief Executive Officer – Institution has a chief executive officer whose full-time or primary responsibility is to the institution.
- 6) Administrative Capacity – Institution has a chief financial officer whose full-time or primary responsibility is to the institution.
- 7) Operational Status – Institution must demonstrate sufficiently mature planning and resources to ensure that the institution will be operational with students actively pursuing its degree program(s) by the time of the Candidacy review.
- 8) Degree Programs: Extent – Substantial portions of the institution’s educational offerings are programs that lead to degrees and significant proportions of its students are enrolled in the degree programs.
- 9) Degree Programs: Quality – Institution’s degree programs are congruent with its purposes, are based on a recognized higher education field of study, are of sufficient content and length, and are conducted at levels of quality and rigor appropriate to the degrees offered.
- 10) Educational Objectives and Student Learning – Institution clearly defines and publishes educational objectives for each program and identifies how these objectives and outcomes will be addressed within the curriculum.
- 11) Academic Credit – Institution awards academic credits based on generally accepted practices in degree-granting institutions of higher education.
- 12) Transfer Credit – Institution accepts transfer students and has established policies for review and acceptance of transfer credits.
- 13) General Education – Institution defines and incorporates into all of its undergraduate degree programs a substantial component of general education.

- 14) Faculty – Institution has a substantial core of qualified faculty, sufficient in size, background, and experience to support all of the institution’s educational program offerings.
- 15) Student Services – Institution provides for all of its students appropriate services that support student learning.
- 16) Admissions – Institution has adopted and adheres to admission policies consistent with its purposes.
- 17) Information and Learning Resources – Institution holds or otherwise provides long-term access to sufficient information and learning resources to support its purposes and all of its educational programs.
- 18) Financial Resources – Institution documents a viable funding base, financial resources, and plans for financial development adequate to support its purposes and educational programs and to ensure financial stability.
- 19) Financial Accountability – Institution annually undergoes and makes available an external financial audit by a certified public accountant or an audit by and appropriate public agency.
- 20) Institutional Planning – Institution provides evidence of basic planning for the development of the institution.
- 21) Institutional Evaluation and Assessment of Student Learning – Institution actively engages in, or has a plan in place to systematically engage in, the evaluation of how well it is accomplishing its purposes related to student learning.
- 22) Public Information – Institution publishes in its catalog accurate and current information that describes its purposes and objectives along with information about admission requirement, financial aid, programs and courses, degrees offered, costs, faculty, etc..
- 23) Relations with the Accrediting Commission – Governing board provides a formal statement that the institution agrees to adhere to these eligibility criteria.